



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

LARGEST DRUG SEIZURE IN RECENT YEARS IN TENNESSEE YIELDS 3,000 POUNDS OF MARIJUANA WITH A STREETVALUE OF \$3 MILLION

***-ICE agents and detectives of the Metropolitan Nashville Police Department's Specialized
Investigations Division teams up to make historic seizure-***

MADISON, TN – Bundles of compressed marijuana hidden in floor tiles were seized here Tuesday by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) special agents at the Direct 2U Tile business located at 1236 Northgate Business Parkway, Suites C3 and D4.

Tuesday's seizure led to the arrests of 28-year-old Julio Rodriguez, a United States citizen and Francisco Jesus Esparza-Ramos, 34, a citizen of Mexico illegally present in the country. The arrests were announced by Jim Vines, United States Attorney for the Middle District of Tennessee, Michael Holt, ICE Special Agent-in-Charge for the Office of Investigations in New Orleans and Ronal Serpas, Chief of the Metropolitan Nashville Police Department.

Julio Rodriguez was charged in federal court with conspiracy to distribute more than 1,000 kilograms of marijuana in violation of 21 United States Code, Section 846. Rodriguez appeared before United States Magistrate Judge E. Clifton Knowles for his initial appearance Feb. 21 and is detained pending a detention and preliminary hearing Friday, March 3. If convicted, Rodriguez faces a sentence of ten years to life for his role in conspiring to distribute marijuana.

Francisco Jesus Esparza-Ramos was charged federally with distribution of marijuana in violation of 21 United States Code, Section 841 after Esparza-Ramos was observed removing approximately 30 pounds of the marijuana from the warehouse. Esparza-Ramos appeared before United States Magistrate Judge E. Clifton Knowles Thursday for his initial appearance and was temporarily detained pending a detention and preliminary hearing scheduled for Tuesday, February 28. If convicted, Ramos faces a maximum sentence of five years.

ICE agents served Esparza-Ramos with being illegally present in the country. He will have to appear before an immigration judge upon the resolution of his criminal case.

The investigation started in early February after law enforcement agents discovered a tractor-trailer that had crossed the United States-Mexican border in Laredo, Texas. A search of the trailer at the

border revealed that it contained a large amount of marijuana secreted within boxes of ceramic floor tiles.

Agents transported the trailer containing the marijuana to a warehouse located at 1236 Northgate Business Parkway, Suites C3 and D4 in Madison, Tennessee. Rodriguez was observed unloading pallets of floor tiles which contained the marijuana. After Rodriguez was arrested ICE agents seized 3,000 pounds of marijuana from the warehouse.

Mr. Holt said, "This seizure sends the clear message to drug smugglers that ICE, along with its federal, state and local law enforcement partners, is shutting down smuggling operations throughout the United States. We will continue using our immigration and customs authorities to prevent the importation of all such illicit narcotics."

The joint investigation was conducted by agents from ICE and detectives from the Metropolitan Nashville Police Department's Specialized Investigations Division. Assistant United States Attorney Blanche Cook for the Middle District of Tennessee is prosecuting the case on behalf of the United States.

The public is reminded that the charges in the criminal complaints are accusations and both defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

U.S. Magistrate Court Case No's. 06-2015MK and 06-2016MK

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.

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